BBC MEDIA ACTION

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA
AROUND THE WORLD

PRACTICE BRIEFING 02

Turn up the volume: empowering women through media

Lessons from BBC Media Action's governance programming

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover image The audience at a special episode of Tanzanian radio magazine programme, *Haba Na Haba*. Produced for the BBC 100 Women season, the programme was made by an all-female team and brought together female leaders and audience members to discuss women in politics.

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INTRODUCTION

Women are under-represented in the decisions that affect their lives, from G20 summits and national parliaments down to local governments and even households.[1] If women's voices are not heard, decisions often fail to meet their needs and may even serve to deepen gender inequality. Equal participation of men and women in decision-making at all levels is important in principle and critical for the development outcomes of women.[2]

The media is a prism through which we see those in power. In many cases, media not only reflects inequalities between men and women but also amplifies and entrenches them. With women the focus of only 10% of news stories, the political sphere all too often features men talking to men about men.[3] However, where media does harm, it has potential to do good.[4] This is where BBC Media Action's expertise lies.

Between 2011 and 2016, BBC Media Action has been supported by a Global Grant from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to deliver governance interventions across nine countries, reaching 190 million people.[5] Working across TV, radio, online and mobile platforms, and through media capacity strengthening activities, BBC Media Action has sought to harness the media's ability to support more accountable states and societies. From the outset, our governance interventions aimed to provide a platform for both men and women to hold their leaders to account, while empowering them to participate in their own communities. This paper will unpick the challenges faced and the solutions found. It will bring together practice and research to examine how effective our factual programmes have been in reaching and impacting on men and women equally.

The paper argues that these projects[6] have been effective in building political knowledge, levels of discussion of governance issues and political participation among both men and women. However, it also draws the tentative conclusion that in Nepal and Bangladesh the programmes may be less effective at empowering female audiences to participate in politics than men. The paper asks why, examining the barriers in those contexts.

The first section sets out the global picture of gender and governance, the backdrop against which the projects operate. Section two outlines BBC Media Action's approach to supporting women to participate in their communities and hold their leaders to account. Section three unpacks the challenges in making governance programmes which are inclusive and gender-sensitive. Section four considers findings from qualitative and quantitative research, weighing up how successful BBC Media Action has been in reaching and impacting women, and exploring in depth where we were less successful. Section five shares what we have learned about mainstreaming gender in media and governance interventions. Section six takes a closer look at BBC Media Action projects in two very different contexts: Nepal and Tanzania. The paper concludes with some recommendations to inform future programming.

GENDER AND GOVERNANCE: THE GLOBAL PICTURE

Women's participation in national and international decision-making is rising, but progress is slow. In August 2015, 22% of the world's parliamentarians were women, up from 11% in 1995.[7] In the upper echelons of global decision-making, the gender disparity is stark: three of the G20 leaders and just one of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s 24 executive directors are women.

But examining governance from a gender perspective is about more than numerical representation in national and international bodies. Governance in its broadest sense refers to formal and informal decision-making at all levels of society: the household, the community, local and national government and global institutions.[8] Understanding the relationship between gender and governance requires looking at the web of norms and expectations that shape men's and women's opportunities and influence how much they participate in, and benefit from, the decisions that affect their lives. It also requires stepping outside the corridors of power to examine how "ordinary" men and women enact their citizenship, get involved in their communities and hold their leaders to account.[9]

Defining gender*

Gender, as defined by the UN, refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and contextually specific. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Women are far from being a homogeneous group and their experiences and position within society are shaped by many factors such as location, age, ethnicity and social class.

*Adapted from UN definition http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm

BBC Media Action is in the unique position of having cross-cultural survey data on exactly that. Across seven diverse countries, it has measured how much men and women know about politics and governance, how often they discuss local and national governance issues and how much they participate in politics and their communities.[10] This 2013–2016 data is based on large, demographically representative samples, reflecting the political engagement of the whole population in these countries, rather than just BBC Media Action's audiences.[11] It sheds light on differences in men and women's engagement with politics and governance, and sets the scene for the exploration of impact in section four.

Defining knowledge, discussion, political participation

Political knowledge refers to an individual's self-reported knowledge of political processes and institutions, rights, governance issues and current affairs. BBC Media Action's international research project measured this by asking respondents to evaluate their knowledge of several governance issues specific to their country, such as corruption or education.

Political discussion on politics or governance issues is a form of public deliberation and civic engagement. This was measured by asking respondents how often they discuss local and national issues with their friends, family members and others.

Political participation refers to how far individuals and groups are actively involved in the public sphere, and political processes, debates and decision-making. This was measured by asking respondents how much they do the following: participate in an organised effort to solve a problem; contact local or national officials; contact traditional leaders; take part in a march or demonstration or participate in local meetings. Where impact is considered in section four, likelihood to vote in local or national elections is also included.

Where BBC Media Action works

Debate programmes bring together live audiences of people from all sections of society with panels of influencers and decision-makers, such as politicians and experts.
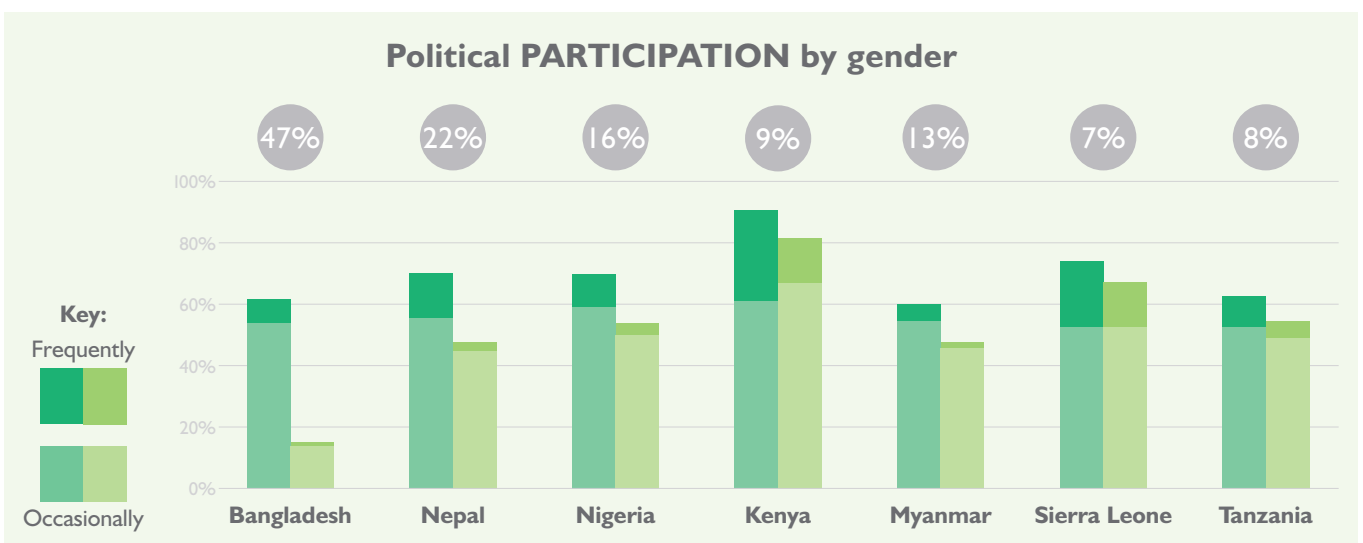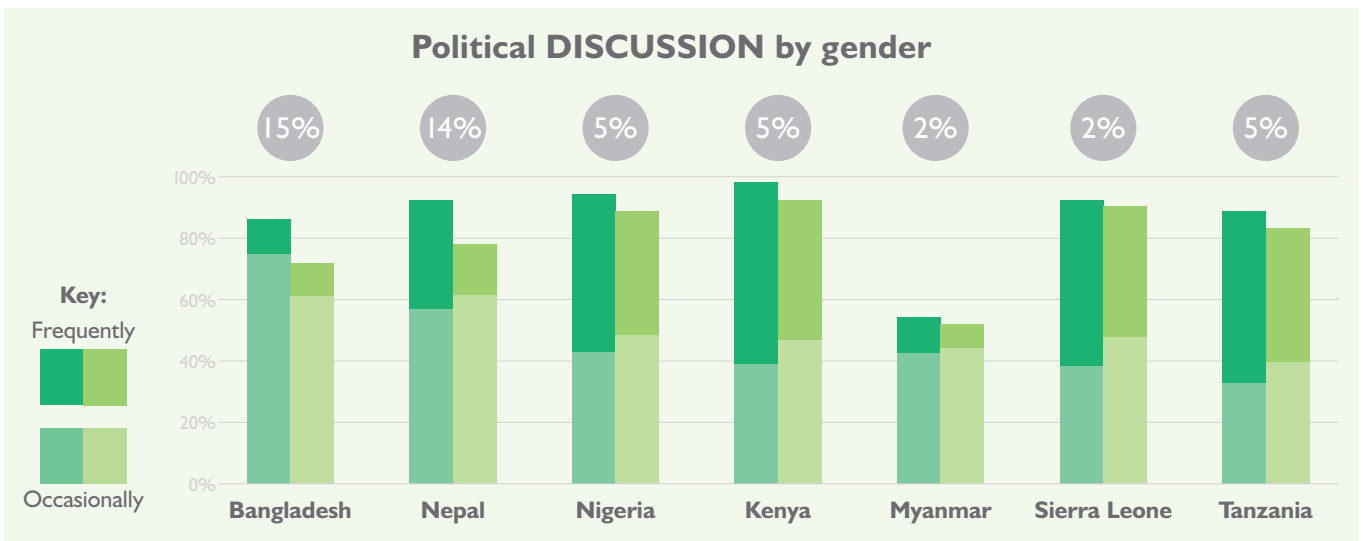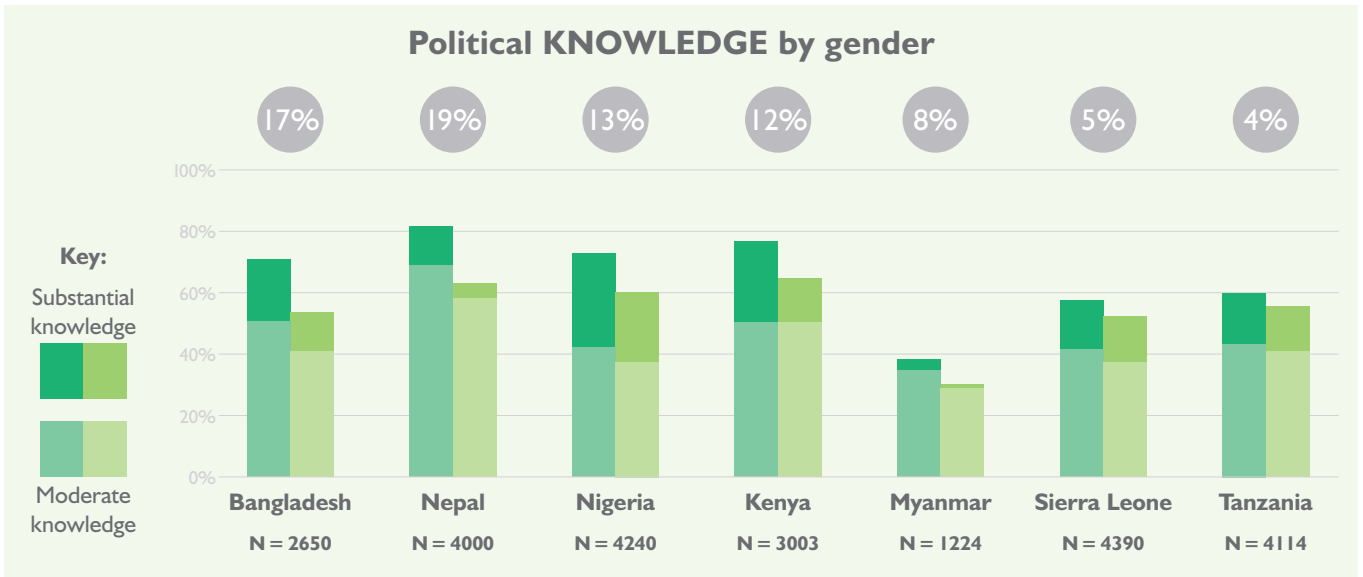
Magazine programmes do not have a live audience but shine a light on particular issues by drawing stories from different parts of the country, interviewing experts and decision-makers and inviting audiences to interact by phone, SMS or social media.

Country	National programmes and format	Data reported (dates)
Afghanistan	*Open Jirga* (Open Assembly) – TV and radio debate	Reach survey (Oct 2014) Qualitative midline (Jan 2015) Qualitative Endline (May & Sept 2016)
Bangladesh	*Sanglap* (Dialogue) – TV and radio debate	Quantitative endline (July 2015)
Kenya	*Sema Kenya* (Kenya Speaks) – TV debate	Quantitative endline (Jan 2015)
Myanmar	*Lin Lat Kyair Sin* (Bright Young Stars) – radio magazine show	Quantitative baseline (Aug 2013) Quantitative endline (July 2016)
Nepal	*Sajha Sawal* (Common Questions) – TV and radio debate	Audience feedback (2013–2014) Quantitative endline (Jan 2016)
Nigeria	*Talk Your Own* and *Mutattauna* (Let's Discuss) – radio magazine shows *Story Story* and *Gatana Gatanan Ku* (Telling a Story) – radio dramas	Quantitative midline (Dec 2014) Quantitative endline (May 2016)
Occupied Palestinian Territories	*Aswat Min Filasteen* (Voices from Palestine) and *Hur El Kalam* (Free to Speak) – TV debates	Quantitative baseline (Sept 2013) Qualitative midline (March 2015) Qualitative endline (Feb 2016)
Sierra Leone	*Tok Bot Salone* (Talk About Sierra Leone) – radio debate *Fo Rod* (At the Crossroads) – radio magazine show	Quantitative midline (July 2013) Reach Survey (Oct 2015)
Tanzania	*Haba Na Haba* (Little by Little) – radio magazine show	Quantitative midline (August 2013) Qualitative endline (August 2015) Reach Survey (April 2016)

Figure 1 Men's and women's political knowledge, discussion and participation in seven countries*

Men   Women   %   Percentage difference between **male** and **female** audiences

Political KNOWLEDGE by gender

Key:
Substantial knowledge

Moderate knowledge

	Bangladesh	Nepal	Nigeria	Kenya	Myanmar	Sierra Leone	Tanzania
% difference	17%	19%	13%	12%	8%	5%	4%
N	N = 2650	N = 4000	N = 4240	N = 3003	N = 1224	N = 4390	N = 4114

Political DISCUSSION by gender

Key:
Frequently

Occasionally

	Bangladesh	Nepal	Nigeria	Kenya	Myanmar	Sierra Leone	Tanzania
% difference	15%	14%	5%	5%	2%	2%	5%

Political PARTICIPATION by gender

Key:
Frequently

Occasionally

	Bangladesh	Nepal	Nigeria	Kenya	Myanmar	Sierra Leone	Tanzania
% difference	47%	22%	16%	9%	13%	7%	8%

*All differences between men and women are statistically significant at p<0.05 except discussion in Myanmar.

How do men and women engage with politics and governance?

Across all seven countries profiled, women know less about politics and governance than men. They also talk about local and national governance issues less than men and participate less in politics and their communities than men.

However, as illustrated by Figure 1, there are substantial differences between contexts. This cross-cultural analysis provides two important insights. Firstly, the gender gap is most stark for political participation: women participate in politics and their communities far less than men. The gap is largest in Bangladesh, where 62% of men participate in politics, compared to 15% of women. A larger gender gap for political participation than for political knowledge or discussion suggests that the factors constraining women's involvement in governance are felt most acutely when it comes to actually taking action.

Second, Bangladesh and Nepal stand out as having the greatest gap between men's and women's political knowledge, discussion and participation. There is no simple explanation for this: the performance of Bangladesh and Nepal on global gender indicators, such as participation in parliament and the labour force, education rates and gender discrimination in legal rights, is comparable to that of Kenya, Tanzania, Nepal and Nigeria.[12] Moreover, no society is homogeneous and the literature includes examples of both women's empowerment and exclusion in Bangladesh and Nepal. However, the marked inequalities between men and women's political participation in these two countries may reflect substantial barriers to participation in public life for large numbers of women.

Why are there gender inequalities in governance?

The imbalance between men and women's role in governance is widely considered to be rooted in the division between "public"and "private" realms.[13] Feminist theorists have argued that the public space of politics and governance is considered a male domain, whereas women's traditional role is restricted to the private realm of the household.[14] This distinction has wide-ranging implications for the opportunities and expectations of men and women in public life. Practical constraints, such as childcare, connected to women's household role mean that many women simply lack the time to get involved. And where a woman's family tightly controls her movement outside the home, participation in public life is near impossible.[15] Social norms can value men's engagement in politics while discouraging women's. Furthermore, a lack of women in positions of power affects how women see themselves.[16] Women feel less confident in their own abilities, express less interest in politics and feel they know less.[17]

2 BBC MEDIA ACTION'S APPROACH: WHAT CAN MEDIA DO?

The principal objective of the projects discussed in this paper is to contribute to more accountable states and societies. Media can create spaces where those in power are exposed to views and questions from all sections of society, requiring them to explain and answer for their actions. For those watching or listening at home, this can inform, stimulate discussion and empower people to participate in their communities.

Looking through a gender lens, media can amplify women's voices and provide a platform for them to hold their leaders accountable. Moreover, it can put gender issues on the political agenda and influence those in power to uphold women's rights. Media can also challenge the norms which restrict women's role in public life, empowering women to participate in their communities.

There is a body of evidence which demonstrates how media can challenge gender stereotypes among its audiences.[18] Some projects in the Global South have had modest success in shifting gender

norms. An evaluation of the drama *Soul City* in South Africa found an association between exposure to the programme and changes in knowledge and attitudes towards intimate partner violence.[19] Media interventions have been shown to be most effective when they have multiple components, are combined with face-to-face engagement and aim to transform gender roles.[20]

The potential is clear. However, global media analysis indicates that, as it stands, media tends to entrench as well as reflect existing gender norms and stereotypes,[21] often stifling women's voices.[22] In this way, the media can perpetuate a male-dominated public sphere. If ignored, media can be an obstacle to women's empowerment, but if harnessed it can enable it.

What this means in practice

BBC Media Action programmes are made in the local language by producers from the broadcast country using detailed research about the target audience. Thus each has a unique flavour. But they are all rooted in the public service values of the BBC: trust, impartiality, creativity and putting the audience at the heart of everything it does. As a public service broadcaster, BBC Media Action is committed to reflecting and representing diversity. To put this ethos into practice, it is committed to mainstreaming gender in all of its work. This involves:

1 Providing a platform for inclusive discussion where female leaders, experts and citizens participate alongside their male counterparts.

2 Making programmes that reach and engage both men and women.

3 Building the political knowledge and discussion of male and female audiences to empower them to participate in their own communities.

These three dimensions are interlinked. Through providing such a platform within the programme itself, the goal is to also reach, engage and empower women watching or listening at home. Sections three and four consider how BBC Media Action creates inclusive discussion within the programmes, and then how successful the projects have been in reaching and impacting female audiences.

3 PROVIDING A PLATFORM FOR INCLUSIVE DISCUSSION

This section unpacks the obstacles faced by BBC Media Action teams producing TV and radio programmes which provide a platform for female leaders, experts and citizens to engage in debate and discussion, alongside men. It also shares some of the solutions found by those teams.

Making governance programmes in which women are seen and heard has raised many practical challenges. In settings where men hold the vast majority of high-level positions within society, including female leaders is difficult. Debate show production teams have to weigh up the relative

importance of decision-making power versus gender balance on panels. Government departments, ministries and non-governmental organisations sometimes refuse to provide a female spokesperson. And female leaders are often reluctant to participate because they doubt their own abilities and feel nervous interacting with the media when it so often attacks and sidelines them.[23]

Recruiting women to participate in studio audiences has also been challenging. Audience recruiters in all countries struggled to persuade women to come to the studio, sometimes failing to convince their husbands or fathers to allow their involvement. Female audience members have been more likely to drop out of programmes at the last minute, and have often lacked the confidence to ask a question once in the studio.

Production teams devised strategies to address these challenges and ensure a range of female voices were represented in their programmes. First, when putting together debate show panels, they began to define decision-makers more broadly.

For example, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the team shifted from a format where audiences posed questions to a single high-level decision-maker each episode to one which features a broader panel where a minister can sit alongside experts and civil society representatives. This has increased women's representation in the *Aswat Min Filasteen* and *Hur El Kalam*'s panels from 14% in 2015 to 50% in 2016.

BBC Media Action has also developed strategies to maximise the number of women in studio audiences. In Nepal, for example, the team over-recruited female audience members to compensate for dropouts and recorded some debates in less formal settings in which women felt more comfortable. On set, production teams put special effort into building women's confidence to ask questions by talking to them one-to-one before the programme. In Nepal, Tanzania, Nigeria and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, BBC Media Action introduced female presenters who have become powerful role models.[24]

Overall, the results of these efforts have been impressive. On average across the five years, 27% of panellists have been female and 44% of audience members have been women. However, there are variations between countries, years and even programme episodes. Some countries, such as Afghanistan, have made steady progress, increasing the proportion of female panellists and audiences year on year. In other countries, changes in the context have led to a drop in female panellists or audience members. For example, holding election candidate debates when few women are running will inevitably reduce the number of female panellists. This happened in Nepal in 2013.

The numbers are important but they are only a starting point. Beyond representation, BBC Media Action has tried to weave gender into programme discussions, analysing how the issues under debate might affect men and women differently.

Figure 2 Participation of men and women in BBC Media Action debate shows in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Sierra Leone.

Panellists

Women 27%
Men 73%

Audience

Women 44%
Men 56%
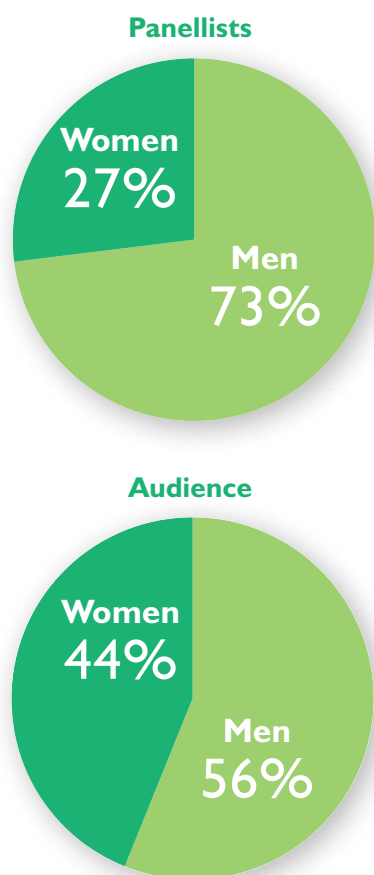
> ❝ We *always made gender part of the programme. For example, if it was on cross-border trade, we'd think about if it affected women in a different way. But we didn't crowbar it in and gender issues weren't directed at women, they were just subtly raised. And we encouraged women to speak without expecting them to be 'the woman's voice'.*❞
>
> JACKIE CHRISTIE, SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER, *SEMA KENYA*, KENYA, 2016

When planning programmes, it has also been crucial to avoid women always speaking on so-called "softer" issues while men dominate discussions on "hard" politics and economics.

The progress that has been made is, in large part, due to the commitment and perseverance of production teams. However, they are often working in media sectors where women are habitually under-represented. This means that female leaders are not accustomed to dealing with media. Moreover, BBC Media Action's teams, who are trained in these environments, may be new to thinking about programme-making from a gender perspective.

> *It took time for us to understand why women should have chance to ask the questions. We thought that only the literate men could ask a good question and if you can't challenge properly there will not be a good programme. It took some time for me as well: because it's not all about being convinced from your mind, you have to be convinced from your heart."*
>
> DIPAK BHATTARAI, EDITOR, *SAJHA SAWAL*, NEPAL, 2016

These challenges are not behind us, but the commitment to meaningfully include female voices has strengthened. The organisation will redouble its efforts to ensure its programmes continue to disrupt the norm whereby political programming means men talking to men about men:

> *It [Open Jirga] helps women in social participation. Women will be encouraged and will get self-confidence. I saw a woman with burqa who asked a question [on Open Jirga]. I know she may have not even dreamed of this day."*
>
> GOVERNANCE EXPERT, AFGHANISTAN, 2015

4 REACHING AND IMPACTING WOMEN

Given the strategies outlined above, this section focuses on evaluating how far BBC Media Action's governance programmes have reached and then impacted on male and female audiences by increasing their political knowledge, discussion and participation.

This paper draws on data from all 2011–2016 factual governance Global Grant projects in nine countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. It also touches on data related to BBC Media Action's dramas as a point of reference. It focuses in detail on the impact of factual governance programming in countries with adequate quantitative data: Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. This is an analysis of findings from Political participation and the media, which gives details of the results and methodology.[25]

Reaching women

Between 2011 and 2016, BBC Media Action's governance programmes reached 190 million people. [26] The most recent data shows that 39% of the audience are women, falling slightly to 37% among the regular audience, who watch or listen to at least every other episode.[27] Beneath these global figures, there are substantial differences between countries. In Kenya, Nigeria and Myanmar, around 45% of the total audience are women. Nepal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, the Occupied Palestinian Territories sit in the middle: 35% to 40% of BBC Media Action audiences are women. In Bangladesh, however, only 17% of its audience was female in 2015, down from 29% in 2014 (these figures are explored in more detail below).
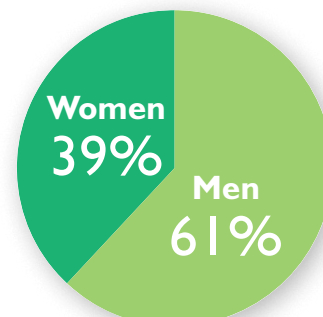
Three key factors influence whether BBC Media Action programmes reach female audiences: when and where a programme is broadcast, the programme format and the political context.

In many countries, BBC Media Action's partner stations and timeslots are not optimal for reaching
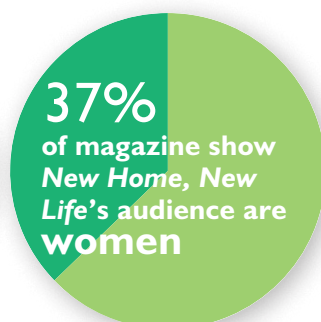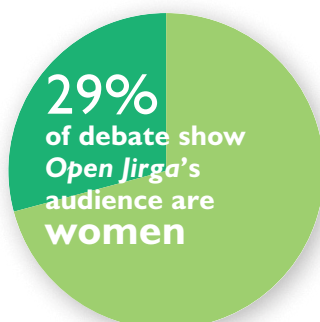
Reach of BBC Media Action governance programmes

	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Myanmar	Kenya	Nepal	Nigeria	Occupied Palestinian Territories	Sierra Leone	Tanzania
Men	63%	83%	53%	57%	63%	57%	61%	61%	62%
Women	37%	17%	47%	43%	37%	43%	39%	39%	38%

Reach (total)

Women 39%

Men 61%

Focus on Afghanistan and Nigeria

Afghanistan

29% of debate show *Open Jirga*'s audience are **women**

37% of magazine show *New Home, New Life*'s audience are **women**

Nigeria

40% of magazine show *Talk Your Own*'s audience are **women**

40% of drama show *Story Story*'s audience are **women**
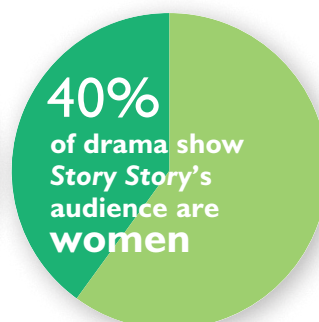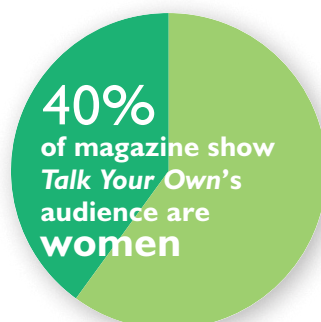
Note: *Village Voice*, an educational programme, is also included in the total figures.

Note: Hausa programmes *Mutattauna* and *Gatana Gatanan Ku* are also included in the total figures.

Right Affi Bassey, co-presenter of Nigerian radio magazine programme, *Talk your Own*.

female audiences. BBC Media Action may have prioritised a popular broadcaster or primetime slot over the proportion of women watching or listening, or it may not have the final say over when programmes air. However, experience in Kenya suggests that this can be overcome. From the outset, the *Sema Kenya* team used data from the Kenya Audience Research Foundation to establish which timeslots would reach female audiences. BBC Media Action negotiated with national and local partners, using data to convince them of the importance of airing programmes at a time convenient for women. This approach paid off – 45% of the *Sema Kenya* audience is female.

The type, or format, of the programme can make a difference. In Afghanistan, BBC Media Action's drama *New Home New Life* attracts a greater proportion of female listeners at 37% of the audience than the political debate programme *Open Jirga* at 29%. And it is not surprising that if women express less interest in politics than men, as evidenced in section one, they will be less interested in programmes about politics, especially when they tend to reflect a male-dominated public sphere. However, political debate is not inherently male and factual governance programming can and should be engaging for women and men alike. This is clearly the case in Nigeria, where 40% of the audiences of both drama *Story Story* and magazine programme *Talk Your Own* are female. Gender can influence how people consume media but how this works in practice varies by context.

Experience in Bangladesh shows that changes in political context can impact female audiences. The proportion of women watching or listening to national debate programme *Sanglap* dropped from 29% in 2014 to 17% in 2015. Analysis by the local team attributed this to a deteriorating political situation and protracted stalemate that has disengaged many Bangladeshis from mainstream political discourse. *Sanglap* has, in fact, lost two-thirds of its overall audience, which has reduced from 35% to 12% of the population. This lost audience is disproportionately female, perhaps suggesting that people already less engaged in politics are the first to lose interest when political crisis hits. Devising ways to keep female audiences interested in times of disillusionment presents a challenge. Any solutions need to be based on research into different women's attitudes and media habits. In retrospect, the local team suggested that broadening the programmes to cover social issues as well as political debates may have been effective.

Having an impact on women's knowledge, discussion and political participation

A crucial element of gender mainstreaming is to disaggregate data to evaluate the impact of BBC Media Action's projects on women and men. This section reports the results of exactly that. These findings are drawn from Political participation and the media, which provides a detailed reporting of the methodology and results.[28]

Explaining the analysis

The study used regression analysis to evaluate the impact of regularly watching or listening to factual governance programming (referred to as "exposure") on political knowledge, discussion and participation. This technique enables researchers to hold other factors constant, in order to isolate the relationship between regularly watching or listening to BBC Media Action's programmes and political knowledge, discussion and participation. This approach cannot prove the impact of BBC Media Action's programmes but, by controlling for various characteristics and attitudes, it can take into account other potentially influencing factors. This analysis controlled for gender, group membership (political parties, religious groups), education, region, age, income and interest in politics.[29] All results presented are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. The results are broken down by gender using interaction effects. It is important to note that the contexts and interventions are diverse and not directly comparable.

Sources: Bangladesh quantitative endline (July 2015); Kenya quantitative endline (Jan 2015); Myanmar quantitative baseline (July 2016); Nepal quantitative endline (Jan 2016); Nigeria quantitative midline (Dec 2014); Sierra Leone quantitative midline (July 2013); Tanzania quantitative midline (August 2013).

Overall, this analysis revealed that:

- Across all seven countries, people who watch or listen to BBC Media Action's governance programmes know more about governance issues, discuss political issues more often and participate more in community and wider politics. This relationship is strong and statistically significant.

Is this the same for men and women?

- In every country, both men and women who watch or listen are much more likely to have higher **political knowledge and discussion** than those who do not watch or listen.
- In Kenya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania, both men and women who watch or listen are much more likely to **participate in politics**, than those who do not watch or listen.
- However, in Bangladesh and Nepal, men who watch or listen are much more likely to **participate in politics**, whereas women who watch or listen are only slightly more likely to participate in politics. The association between exposure to BBC Media Action governance programmes and political participation is significantly stronger for men than for women.

Interpreting these results

For political knowledge and discussion, the combination of the regression results and qualitative evidence gives us greater confidence that our governance programmes are having a positive impact for men and women.

" *…I didn't know some of the education issues but I got to know them through the programme."*
FEMALE, 24–34 YEARS, TANZANIA, 2015

" *If the issue is really touching, then I call my friend and ask [them] to listen [to] the show."*
FEMALE, 18–24 YEARS, NEPAL, 2014

Exposure to BBC Media Action governance programmes is associated with increased political participation for men and women in equal proportions in the majority of countries, despite the multiple barriers that restrict women's participation in public life. Some qualitative research, collected throughout the Global Grant project, illustrates how female audiences can be empowered to act:

> **"** *The role played by the programme during the elections was very big, for instance if we start with women, in the past women used to think that participating in the elections was a waste of time. But this year, due to the encouragement they got from the Haba Na Haba, they came to understand that if they don't vote they lose an important basic right."*
> FEMALE, 18–24 YEARS, TANZANIA, 2015

This has also been reflected in qualitative research in Afghanistan:

> **"** *A lady… participated in Open Jirga from Khost province and asked [President] Hamid Karzai why he is not rebuilding Khost's road […] I like her courage for asking […] When the ladies ask questions of the officials, I become encouraged and proud of them."*
> FEMALE, AFGHANISTAN, 2016

However, in Bangladesh and Nepal the relationship between exposure to the programmes and increased political participation is weaker for women than for men. Clearly, having an impact on political participation will be more challenging than increasing political knowledge and discussion. This is because taking action can depend on freedom to move outside the home and the availability of opportunities to participate, as well as a person's confidence in their own capacity to effect change. And for some women these barriers may be too great to be shifted by a single media intervention.

It is possible to divide the countries into three categories:

- **Kenya and Myanmar** have a high proportion of women in their audiences (around 45%), and men and women who regularly watch and listen are more likely to know about, discuss and participate in politics more.

- **Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Nigeria** have audiences where women are a minority (less than 40%). But women who do regularly watch or listen report increased political knowledge, discussion and participation in line with their male counterparts.

- **Bangladesh and Nepal** are countries where BBC Media Action is struggling to reach female audiences (most acutely in Bangladesh) and the association between exposure to the programmes and political participation is weaker for women than for men.

Figure 3 Exposure and political participation
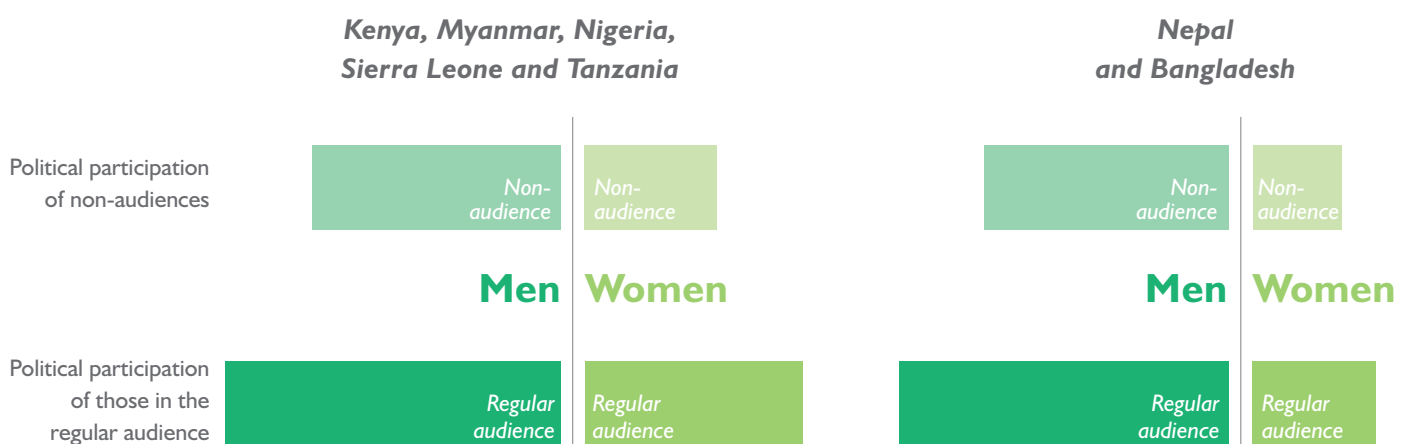
Where women are a small minority in the audience and programmes may be having a lesser impact on women's political participation than men's, there is a danger that BBC Media Action governance projects are actually worsening inequalities between men and women's political participation. This is particularly the case in Bangladesh, where only 17% of the regular audience members are women.

It is striking that the two countries where it may be most challenging to increase women's political participation are those with the greatest existing gap between male and female political participation. As noted earlier, only 15% of women in Bangladesh participate in politics, compared to 62% of men. Similarly, 48% of women participate in politics in Nepal, compared to 70% of men. It is not the case that the position of women is simply worse in Bangladesh and Nepal than in the other countries where BBC Media Action works, but the cultural and social norms that restrict women's participation in public life appear to be more rigid in those countries (see the Nepal case study below for more detail). It seems logical that a media intervention may make less impact on women's political participation where inequalities between men and women's political engagement are greater in the first place. In such contexts, it is all the more vital to develop bold strategies where media supports and enhances other interventions to address gender inequality to close the gap.

5 WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

The process of designing and delivering any project is comprised of a series of decisions. These decisions can be big ones, such as what type of programmes to make, or smaller ones, like which politicians to invite to a particular episode. While making these decisions, we are often also deciding who to include and who to exclude – impacted by the choice of where and when to record or broadcast a programme, the topic discussed, who is interviewed and whose story is told. All of these choices have a gender dimension but many also entail trade-offs. Should BBC Media Action aim for the largest audience or the most gender-balanced? Should it include the most senior decision-makers on a panel or a more junior woman? This is the first time we have brought together our research and practice on gender from across governance projects. Here, four key learnings are presented.

As described in section four, reaching female audiences has been a persistent challenge for BBC Media Action. The organisation has learned the importance of meeting female audiences where they are. From the outset, programme design should treat the need to engage women as a primary concern, using careful analysis of women's media preferences, habits and access to inform decisions. This means selecting TV channels, radio stations and timeslots most suited to women, as well as sometimes sacrificing overall reach in primetime slots for a higher female audience share.

Secondly, there is no substitute for designing a project based on analysis of the context. Findings from Bangladesh and Nepal suggest that where there are substantial discrepancies between men's and women's political participation, special attention should be paid to identifying the barriers to women's participation in public life and devising ways to overcome them. This was not done systematically at the start of these projects and is certainly something which could be done differently next time. The literature suggests that one effective way to translate a person's knowledge into practice is to integrate interpersonal communication with mass media.[30] Where increasing women's political participation is particularly challenging, interpersonal communication delivered in collaboration with local women's organisations could be used to boost it. In Tanzania, women have spontaneously joined together to listen to the radio programme, *Haba Na Haba*. This could be built into projects from the start in the future.

Thirdly, governance projects comprising multiple programmes in different formats may be more effective in reaching and engaging women. Although it can be more difficult to attract female audiences to conventional political debate programmes, it would be counterproductive to abandon them altogether,

or decide that debate shows are for men and dramas for women. Combining political debate programmes that have a strong emphasis on gender with other formats could simultaneously challenge the perception that political programming is for men and engage a wider audience.

Finally, notwithstanding successful efforts to provide a platform for women to engage in debate, there is still more that can be done to really hear women's voices. With every programme we make, we should be asking ourselves: does this programme reinforce or challenge the perception that the political sphere is a male domain?

Right Bidhya Chapagain, presenter of Nepali debate show, *Sajha Sawal*, interviewing a man for a special episode in the aftermath of the earthquake in 2015.

6 NEPAL CASE STUDY

BBC Media Action has produced national TV and radio debate programme *Sajha Sawal* in Nepal since 2011. It reaches 6.6 million Nepalis, with 4.6 million watching regularly. BBC Media Action has also produced 1,238 local radio versions with 10 local broadcasters, building their capacity to create engaging, impartial governance content. The results explored below refer only to the national programme.

Sajha Sawal's female audience has remained stable at between 37% and 39%. Regression analysis found that the association between exposure to *Sajha Sawal* and increased political participation is weaker for women than for men. A review by the production team and three external experts[31] identified two principal reasons for this. Firstly, while the 2015 Nepali constitution enshrines women's rights and gender equality, restrictive social norms, traditional family structures and harmful cultural practices restrict women's autonomy and create barriers to their participation in public life.[32] In some areas, women's participation in public life is particularly constrained – during one recording of *Sajha Sawal*, a man refused to appear alongside women in the audience. Secondly, women in Nepal shoulder a huge burden of work in the household, limiting their time to participate in politics.[33] But Nepal is by no means a homogeneous society and many have reported increased women's community-based organisation, including mothers' clubs and forest users' groups.[34]

Media alone cannot overcome these barriers but it can help to erode patriarchal attitudes. The *Sajha Sawal* team have been making changes to ensure that the programme is more engaging and impactful for women. Appointing female presenter Bidhya Chapagain has created a powerful role model and disrupted existing norms:

> ❝ *Looking at me asking questions, which is usually the job of men, [women] can relate to it and think they can ask too."*
> BIDHYA CHAPAGAIN, PRESENTER, *SAJHA SAWAL*, NEPAL, 2016

Dr Meena Poudel, gender and governance expert, observes, "The way Bidhya talks and approaches people… empowers people to speak out." Arguably, Bidhya has also had greater access to women's lives than a male journalist, which influences the editorial agenda. For example, while filming in a remote village, a 15-year-old girl confided in Bidhya that she would soon be married against her will. After broadcast, this story received widespread positive feedback on social media.

The team has also experimented with *Sajha Sawal*'s format,[35] covering a wider range of issues which research has told them are of interest to women. Some episodes have adapted the debate set-up, featuring leaders sitting among the audience in a circle instead of on a panel, or politicians travelling to villages:

> ❝ *Instead of bringing people to a flashy studio, we brought the experts, the politicians and the bureaucrats to the people: to the community taps, the fields, the tea shops. And there, we found that women asked questions easily."*
> DIPAK BHATTARAI, EDITOR, *SAJHA SAWAL*, NEPAL, 2016

Quantitative research shows that women find *Sajha Sawal* increasingly relevant. In 2013, 77% of female viewers or listeners said it covered issues relevant to them, compared to 91% of men. In 2015, 94% of women and 90% of men found the issues covered by the programme relevant. Some of the changes to the format, discussed above, have been made since the quantitative endline research in December 2015, so these results will not fully capture the impact of such changes.

Right
Marygoreth Richard, co-presenter of Tanzanian radio magazine programme, *Haba Na Haba*.

7 TANZANIA CASE STUDY

In Tanzania, BBC Media Action's national radio magazine programme *Haba Na Haba* airs on BBC Swahili and a network of local radio stations. Reaching 7.2 million Tanzanians, the show addresses a different governance or social topic each week, bringing together packages from local partner stations to show how the issue affects communities across the country. Decision-makers and experts then answer questions on the issue in the studio. Special episodes of the programme take the format of a debate with a panel of leaders and a live audience. After the programmes air on local stations, a follow-up discussion enables audiences to have their say.

The association between exposure to *Haba Na Haba* and increased political knowledge, discussion and participation is the same for men and women. Qualitative research adds depth to quantitative findings:

> *We formed a group of five people and we used to discuss a lot about Haba Na Haba and the election processes."*
>
> FEMALE, 35+ YEARS, TANZANIA, 2015

In achieving these results, the programme is building on a broadly positive local context. A BBC Media Action staff member observes: "Women used to be silent and now they raise their hands – it was taboo before." Literacy rates for men and women aged 15–24 are very closely matched, with 77% for men and 73% for women. And the gender gap for political knowledge, discussion and participation is slim across the population: 62% of men participate in politics, compared to 54% of women.

However, there are still many barriers to women's political participation in Tanzania. Many families restrict women's movement outside the home.[36] In some cases, women's voting preference is decided by their husbands.[37]

The efforts made by the *Haba Na Haba* production team offer some lessons. A male and female co-presenting team was introduced to role model men and women talking together about governance issues, and received positive audience feedback. The team included elements deemed more appealing to women, such as drama and even poetry. The editorial agenda prioritised issues that directly affect women's lives and well-being but are rarely framed as important governance concerns of interest to a broad audience, such as cervical screening and fistula.

These episodes have really resonated with female audiences. Women usually represent 3% of those who text the show but this rose to 19% for an episode on child health. However, qualitative research with audiences highlights a trade-off:

> *I once asked a certain person why he wasn't listening to Haba Na Haba anymore. He said that the programme prefers to discuss…women and children issues."*
>
> ALE, 35+ YEARS, TANZANIA, 2015

Clearly, BBC Media Action should not stop addressing such issues for fear of alienating male audiences. However, such topics must be made relevant to male audiences as their engagement is indispensable.

In spite of these efforts, *Haba Na Haba's* reach among women only rose from 36% to 38% between 2013 and 2015. This partly due to the timeslot and the main broadcast partner, neither of which are optimal for reaching women:

> *As the programme is broadcast in the morning, woman is busy cleaning the house or dressing the children for church or doing something else."*
>
> ALE, 25–34 YEARS, TANZANIA, 2015

Tracking feedback over time shows that audiences are now more positive about the role of women in the programme. However, some still feel the programme is male-dominated. Nonetheless, the programme may be contributing to attitudinal shifts among men:

> *There was a time the ACT [Alliance for Change and Transparency] party leader was invited on the programme and this made me see that a woman has a role to play in society."*
>
> MALE, TANZANIA, 2015

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In much of the world, the gender inequalities in governance are stark. The media reinforces gender stereotypes and portrays a political sphere that is not for women. In such environments, working with media to produce programmes that empower women is both challenging and necessary.

Since 2011, BBC Media Action governance projects have grappled with both creating programmes that give men and women equal opportunities to discuss issues and hold leaders to account, and empowering male and female audiences to participate in community and wider politics. Undertaking this work in male-dominated political and media environments has been extremely challenging. The enormous amount of groundwork involved in just getting women in the studio must not be underestimated.

The results of BBC Media Action's efforts to do so are impressive: 27% of panellists and 44% of live audience members in the debates programmes have been women across the lifetime of the project. This is a challenge for most broadcasters: around 35% of panellists on *Question Time*, on the domestic BBC, are female.[38] Beyond representation, programme makers have learned to weave gender into governance discussions. These results are a testament to the commitment and perseverance of BBC Media Action's production teams. But this progress has involved difficult decisions and trade-offs. For example, in Tanzania, some men may be less attentive to gender-related issues in the programme.

The most disappointing results are BBC Media Action's at-home audience reach among women, which stands at only 37%. The Nepal and Tanzania case studies show that huge efforts to engage women do not always translate into audience figures. Although some factors are outside the organisation's control, prioritising the need to reach women from the outset of a project, and selecting broadcast partners and timeslots accordingly, can make a difference. In addition, even though the majority of audience members are male, qualitative research indicates that programming is opening up more men's minds to the possibility that women can play a role in politics.

For the women who do tune in, the results are noteworthy. Across all seven research countries, regularly watching or listening to BBC Media Action's governance programmes is associated with increased political knowledge and discussion among men and women in equal proportions. In five of the seven countries, exposure to these programmes is also associated with increased political participation for men and women in equal proportions. Given the practical, social and cultural barriers to women's political participation, this evidence is exciting. It also supports BBC Media Action's theory of change: that media can inform, stimulate discussion and empower audiences to take action in their own lives.

In Nepal and Bangladesh, however, the association between exposure to BBC Media Action's governance programmes and political participation is weaker for women than for men. This may reflect contexts where women face particularly intransigent barriers to taking action. Where women's autonomy is restricted, media can inform them and expose to them to new ideas. But to increase political participation, media projects would work best alongside wider efforts. These findings must be taken seriously; where women are both a small audience minority and a programme has less impact on their political participation than on their male counterparts, there is a danger that governance projects are actually worsening inequalities between men and women's political participation. As explored in the Nepal case study, these findings have prompted reflection on BBC Media Action's practice and how to adapt programmes to be more engaging for women.

Recommendations

Reflecting on BBC Media Action's practice and examining its research through a gender lens has generated important lessons for anyone working with media to empower women and increase their involvement in governance. The following recommendations focus on how to develop effective media and communication projects in this area.

1 **Tap into media's potential:** BBC Media Action's experience,[39] alongside other evidence,[40] reinforces the position that media can be transformational. When it comes to gender, the media is ignored at our peril: if development practitioners do not work with it, it can uphold and ingrain gender norms and stereotypes. But when harnessed, media can support men and women to make their voices heard and hold their leaders to account.

2 **Think about gender at every juncture:** Every decision, from programme design through to delivery, has the potential either to include or exclude different groups. For example, in deciding when a programme goes on air, the production teams often weigh up the potential audience size against reach among particular groups, such as women. Being mindful of the trade-offs in these choices, and making sacrifices where necessary, can prevent unwittingly leaving women behind.

3 **Get to grips with how different women consume different media:** To engage women with media outputs, we must meet them where we are. We cannot assume that women's media habits and preferences are either exactly the same as, nor totally different from, men's, or indeed each other's. Instead, programming should be based on careful, robust analysis of how different women access and consume media in a particular context, including the extent to which they have autonomy over what they watch or listen to.

4 **Analyse what stops women from getting involved in politics:** In some contexts, the barriers to women participating in community-based and wider politics are particularly entrenched. Where women's political participation is low, researching the barriers they face can support programming that addresses, rather than entrenches, inequalities between men and women. These barriers could be implicit or explicit, visible or invisible. They might be related to a women's confidence in herself, or externally imposed by society. In many cases, the two are inextricably linked. Since evidence suggests that media interventions are more likely to achieve changes in behaviour when they are combined with interpersonal communication, integrating face-to-face engagement could be particularly fruitful.

5 **Innovate with formats:** In some contexts, particularly Bangladesh, reaching female audiences with political debate programmes has been challenging. Political debate is not inherently unfriendly to women, but the form it currently takes often is. Combining mutually reinforcing factual, entertainment and drama programmes that appeal to different audiences can make governance programming more relevant for women and men.

6 **Don't just see women, hear them:** Seeing more women in the media is important, be that journalists, politicians, experts or ordinary people. But simply getting women on screen or on the airwaves is only half the battle. The media needs to really listen to women and give their views the same weight as men's. Women are, of course, far from a homogeneous group: the art is to amplify female voices without branding them "the female voice".

7 **Role modelling is powerful:** In media environments, where women are often sidelined, giving visibility to women can create powerful role models, reflecting back society as it could be. And women are not just role models for women – qualitative research has shown male audiences responding positively to female presenters, leaders and audience members.

ENDNOTES

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[6] This evaluation focuses only on Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania, where there is adequate quantitative data.

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[23] This is drawn from discussions with teams in Nepal, Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

[24] This has been highlighted in audience feedback and qualitative research – see the Nepal case study for more detail.

[25] Scavo and Snow, Political participation and the media.

[26] This is drawn from reporting for BBC Media Action's Annual Review 2016.

[27] The Occupied Palestinian Territories are not included in the regular reach figures as BBC Media Action's programme there is only broadcast once a month: not sufficiently often to have a "regular" audience.

[28] Scavo and Snow, Political participation and the media.

[29] In this case: gender, membership of political parties or religious groups, education level, region, age, income and degree of interest in politics.

[30] Fulu and Kerr-Wilson, Interventions to prevent violence against women and girls; Marcus, *Changing discriminatory norms affecting adolescent girls through communications*.

[31] Interviews were conducted with a government official, a senior journalist and a gender expert, as well as with BBC Media Action's project, production and research teams.

Right
Local women of Mugu (Karnali Zone of Mid-Western Region), one of the most remote areas of Nepal, share their issues and problems with Sajha Sawal presenter Bidhya Chapagain.

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